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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses four recent trends affecting elementary school administration, concentrating on the most important trend--the new emphasis on the elementary principal as instructional leader. Schools where principals are actively involved in instructional programs are places charged with excitement, cooperation, professionalism, and a climate of open acceptance and support. Instructional leaders are distinguished by a clearly defined school vision, an ability to translate vision into instructional goals and expectations for students and teachers, creation of a supportive school environment, involvement in monitoring instructional programs, and an ability to intervene in a supportive or corrective manner when necessary. Obstacles to instructional leadership may be diminished by learning more effective time management and delegation practices. The second significant trend is the restructuring of the elementary principal's role to encompass change agent and risk-taker responsibilities. The third trend is that elementary principals' responsibilities are being redefined to include provision of individualized and personalized staff development opportunities. Principals are learning to become resource providers and instructional resource facilitators. The fourth trend is recognition of the important role that elementary principals must play in early identification of at-risk students. (MLH)

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TRENDS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

ADDRESS TO THE SOUTHEASTERN

REGIONAL WORKSHOP OF THE ARKANSAS

ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

RISEN, ARKANSAS

MAY 6, 1988

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As elementary principals you can be proud of the improvements and innovations that have marked elementary education over the past decade. I applaud you on having met the challenges of educational reform and for recognizing the paramount role you play in the lives of children.

Let me preface my remarks this morning by stating a truism that twenty-three years as a public school administrator and two years as a college teacher of educational administration has taught me. "It's a lot easier to tell or teach someone how to be an educational administrator than to be one yourself". I hope that you will recognize in my remarks a clear understanding of the difficult and demanding role each of you must play in your individual schools. What I want to do this morning is to share with you some of the significant trends, as I see them, that are affecting elementary school administration. I have tried to select those trends that I feel have had or will have an impact in the immediate future.

I began this search for recent trends by listing some eleven significant trends, but due to the time retrains I have reduced that original eleven to four trends. I am going to briefly discuss each of these trends and then use the remainder of my time this morning to discuss in detail the one trend I believe most significant for your efforts as elementary principals.

I. The first trend that I have identified is a **new emphasis on the role of the elementary principal as an instructional leader.** This is not to say that elementary principals have not always been interested in the instructional program. Indeed, for the most part elementary principals have always came from the ranks of classroom teachers, something that hasn't

always been true on the secondary level. But I believe their is a new awareness that "yes, indeed, the elementary principal does make a difference in student learning in his or her school". That you are no longer just interested spectators of classroom instruction, but that you are instead key elements in the learning process and even more importantly, you are facilitators of learning.

Schools where principals are actively involved in the instructional programs are schools that are "charged" with excitement, cooperation, professionalism and a climate of open acceptance and support. The kind of environment in which positive learning occurs.

It would seem to me that elementary principals who are instructional leaders are distinguished from non-instructional leaders as a result of having five essential priorities:

1. First, a clearly defined vision of what they want their schools to become. A vision, it would seem to me, that focuses on students and their needs.
2. A second priority is to translate that vision into instructional goals and even more importantly into expectations of both students and teachers.
3. A third priority the instructional leader displays is the establishment of a school environment that supports progress toward those established goals and expectations.
4. A fourth priority is to continously monitor instructional progress. This requires that principals become actively involved in their school's instructional program.

5. The final priority is to be prepared to intervene in a supportive or even corrective manner when this is deemed necessary.

II. The second trend that seems significant to me is that the **elementary principal's role is in the process of being restructured in a manner that requires that he or she must be an effective change agent.** Yes, even a risk-taker. If the principal is to be an effective instructional leader then he must affect change within his building. Principals must recognize that change is the most important tool that an instructional leader possesses.

Even though change is a vital tool for improvement, change is resisted by most people. That is certainly natural and understandable. Change seems to increase all of our insecurities and at least in its initial stages requires additional work. Let me suggest how you, as principals, can ensure better acceptance of your role as a change agent:

1. First, provide for a secure environment within your school. Change yes---threatening and insecure environments no. Strive to make your school have a positive climate for change.
2. Introduce new practices carefully. Principals should be encouraging experimentation, without penalizing development efforts on the part of staff members along the way.
3. Resistance should be expected in any change effort. People don't like to plow new fields. Be cognizant of any staff resistance, but don't let it deter you from your plans.
4. Finally, as you implement change, build on the desire of others for approval and the need for personal accomplishments.

Fifteen years ago when I began as an elementary principal I'm afraid that my goal, like those of my colleagues, was to be defenders of the status-quo. If very little was happening, then very little could go wrong. It is no wonder that the current wave of educational reform began outside the ranks of professional educators. We need to be risk-takers in what we propose and in what we support as principals.

III. The third trend I would like to call to your attention is **a new definition of the responsibilities of elementary principals in individualizing and personalizing staff development opportunities for their staffs.** I am sure all of you are well acquainted with the requirements of the Arkansas Plan for Individualized Personal Growth for each staff member. I feel certain that there is little that I could add to your knowledge of that subject.

However, if your staff members are to receive maximum growth from this individualized approach, I think that the role of the principal, in regard to staff development, must change. Instead of the traditional role, the principal must focus his or her attention on such staff development tasks as becoming:

1. A resource provider---one who undertakes actions to marshall personnel and resources within his school to meet the professional growth neds of the staff. This role, it seem to me, requires informing teachers of professional growth opportunities and encouraging experimentation.

2. Instructional resource facilitator---this will require that principals must keep current on both curriculum and instructional trends and innovations. This can be accomplished in part by reading a wide variety of professional journals and by attemding staff development workshops outside their own school district.

While this new approach to staff deveopment is in its infancy, it affords elementary principals their greatest opportunities to affect change. But, it is also going to provide the greatest challenges to principals to become truly instructional leaders.

IV. The fourth trend that seems to be emerging in education in general, but has major ramifications for elementary principals, is the **recognition of the important role that elementary schools must play in the early identication of at-risk students.** But, not only to identify the future dropouts, discipline problems or serious underachievers, but to take definitive actions during the primary grades to move these students back into the mainstream of learning.

We all recognize that success builts on success and, of course, failure breds failure; however, we also have to recognize that we can indeed do things to assist at-risk students. Those of us in elementary education "who are more often than not immuned from the later results of not having adequately dealt with at-risk students", should be about the tasks of:

1. Identifying definite warning signs or indicators of primary-aged children who could be future dropouts, major discipline problems or serious underachievers. While poor attendance, low grades, low

family income and early discipline problems are no doubt good indicators, I suspect that there are many others we have missed along the way.

2. Secondly, we must begin to design and implement alternative programs and strategies, even in the early primary grades, that will better meet the needs of at-risk students.

As time permits, let me focus our attention, once again, on the role of the elementary principal as an instructional leader. I think we all need to focus on why many principals don't become instructional leaders in their schools. It would seem to me that a small number don't want to become instructional leaders and an even smaller number are not capable of the role. However, I believe the problem is much more complex than may first appear. There are two major obstacles to principals reaching the goal of effective instructional leadership:

1. The first is the time element. Too much to do and too little time in which to accomplish all the required tasks.
2. Secondly, most people, including teachers, view principals in the more traditional role, and that certainly is not as an instructional leader.

Let's talk a moment about the obstacle of not enough time. The problem is that time is eaten up with managerial tasks. There always seems to be a crisis or emergency to deal with. In addition, parents and staff members are always wanting to conference. We all need to learn to say "no" more often to managerial types of requests for our time. We need to learn to be proud of turning down requests by saying, "That's not going to be possible, I'm going to be in first grade classrooms all morning."

In order to accomplish this task we are going to have to re-educate parents, staff members, central office personnel and even, God forbid, the superintendents on what are our real priorities. We need to request that parents and staff members make appointments in advance for conferences at our convenence, accept in dire emergencies. When was the last time you walked into another professional's office, such as a doctor, denist or lawyer, and was ushered in without an appointment. Recently I had to wait three weeks to get to talk with a landscape architect.

I would also suggest that as principals we ought to be doing the following:

1. First, learning to better manager our time and deal with paperwork in a more effective and efficient manner. This might involve taking a workshop or two in effective time management techniques. But, of course, good workshops take time too.
2. Secondly, we need to learn to delegate more effectively. "Who am I going to delegate to, I don't have an assistant", you ask. But you do have an effective secretary who can manage much of the paperwork and many of the routine problems that occur in the office. What about your staff? Instead of your delegating, I would almost bet that many of your teachers are "delegating up" many of their duties and responsibilities. Begin to delegate routine tasks to your staff.

If you are to become an effective instructional leader I would suggest that beginning next week that you set aside a couple of mornings or afternoons each week to visit in classrooms. Announce that you will be in classrooms, rather than in your office. And only a dire life-threating emergency are to interrup you. Not cut fingers, not unhappy parents, a broken projector or a

special called meeting by a central office supervisor. Come hell or high water you are going to be in those classrooms. Try it, you'll like your= self alot better.

END

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